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ITEM III "THE ROLLING THUNDER ATTACK"

Paragraph B. "Factors Conditioning the Nature and Scale of Attacks, Geographic Limitations or Casualties, Etc."

1. There are a number of factors which precondition the nature and scale of attacks under the ROLLING THUNDER program. These factors are discussed below.

a. Armed Reconnaissance Area. Enclosure A presents graphically the areas within which armed reconnaissance strikes have been authorized since the inception of the ROLLING THUNDER program. The area established by RT 30 (3-16 September 1965) continued until the standdown on 24 December. The final line provides for a 30 NM buffer along the Communist China border which is not acknowledged as a military requirement.

b. Other Area Restrictions. While not area restrictions per se, fixed targets were generally held to the southern areas of the DRV, moving northward at about the same rate as the armed reconnaissance areas.

c. Armed Reconnaissance Missions/Sorties. Enclosure B sets forth in tabular form the evolution of the armed reconnaissance missions/sorties. Initially, and to the detriment of the program since the possibility of tactical surprise was dissipated by an inadequate effort, armed reconnaissance strikes were restricted to specific LOC routes. This was subsequently changed to areas with sortie limitations. The number of sorties increased from 24/24 hours to 1200/2-week period with timing at CINCPAC's discretion.

d. Fixed Targets. Enclosure C sets forth the evolution of the attack of fixed targets. The number of fixed targets began with 2 targets/week, increased to 15 targets/week, early in the program, however, was reduced to 5 targets/2-week period during the last 12 weeks of the program. This represented

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*JCS and USAF review(s) completed.

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a marked reduction of effort against fixed targets, in contrast to recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Also attacks of primary land LOCs were not authorized until RT 34/35, 1-14 October. The rationale was not apparent. Type fixed targets are summarized by RT package in Enclosure C.

e. Type Targets. While fixed targets are specified under the RT program, some flexibility existed in the area of armed reconnaissance strikes. Initially, armed reconnaissance strikes were directed along specific routes against military movement facilities, ferris, radar sites, secondary bridges and other targets of military character. Subsequently, the objective was expanded to sustaining for maximum feasible periods, day and night interdiction of LOCs, through surveillance and destruction of targets of military character encountered, including but not limited to trucks, ferries, lighters, radar sites, secondary bridges, road repair equipment, bivouac and staging areas. The objective of the coastal armed reconnaissance strikes were to include destruction of recognized DRV naval craft, and other craft which fired on our aircraft, along the DRV coast, in estuaries and mooring areas and in vicinity of coastal islands. In RT-18, 11-17 June, it was stated that daylight armed reconnaissance could include missions to obtain maximum surveillance of LOCs and selected missions with the primary purpose of conducting small precise attacks against pre-briefed military targets with secondary emphasis on the conduct of armed route reconnaissance. Next RT 22/23 (9-22 July), ^{authorized armed reconnaissance against} airfields and JCS numbered LOC targets which have been assigned in previous ROLLING THUNDER strikes, and are observed to be under repair. ~~were~~

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~~included with the objective of maintaining them non-operational.~~
 Naval craft berthing areas were added to the foregoing by
 RT 26/27, 9-19 August, and possible SAM systems within the
 authorized armed reconnaissance area by RT 30/31, 3-16 September.

f. Miscellaneous Restrictions. In addition to the above,
 a number of miscellaneous restrictions have been placed on
 the ROLLING THUNDER program, examples of which are:

(1) Mandatory VNAF participation. This restriction was
 removed early in the program.

(2) No recycles. This restriction was removed early in
 the program.

(3) No prestrike reconnaissance. This restriction was
 removed early in the program.

(4) No restrikes. This restriction was removed early
 in the program.

(5) BDA immediately before or during strike. This
 restriction was removed early in the program.

(6) No Napalm. This restriction was removed early in
 the program.

(7) Expenditure of ordnance. Unused ordnance was
 initially expended by jettisoning it into the China Sea.
 RT-9 (2-8 April) authorized using unexpended ordnance to
 attack Tiger Island. RT 34/35 (1-14 October) authorized
 all previously struck JCS targets plus rail and highway
 LOCs in the authorized armed reconnaissance area.

(8) Dams and Locks. These targets, considered since the
 inception of the program as being important to waterway
 transportation interruption were not authorized for attack
 and a specific prohibition was written into RT 36/37,
 15-28 October.

(9) SAM systems. RT-16, 25 May - 3 June, directed
 that DRV SAM systems would be avoided. SAM attacks
 against our aircraft began during RT-17, 4-10 June,
 launched from the DRV politically assured sanctuary.
 It soon became clear that SAM battalions were using

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mobile ambush tactics. Subsequently, special anti-SAM missions were conducted in the DRV within prescribed geographical areas. In RT 28/29, 20 August - 2 September, these operations within the authorized reconnaissance areas were incorporated in the ROLLING THUNDER program. RT 38/39, 29 October - 11 November, at long last authorized an SA-2 SAM facility within the 30 NM circle of Hanoi, a first both as to type of target and strike entry within the politically assured Hanoi sanctuary. The final significant action taken on SAM system restrictions was in RT 42/43, 26 November - 9 December, which authorized MIG CAP and screen aircraft to suppress SAM attacks. These restrictions have violated military prudence and logic being imposed for asserted political reasons.

(10) Ports. The ROLLING THUNDER program does not authorize the mining of principal ports or the attack of major ports, which greatly hampers the accomplishment of an interdiction program.

(11) Airfields. The major airfields in the northern areas of the DRV have not been approved for attack. Also there are specific prohibitions against CAP and screening aircraft attacking these airfields even in hot pursuit.

g. Civilian Casualties. Civilian casualties have been avoided to the extent possible. Targets which involve estimated high civilian casualties have not been approved for attack. It is significant that credible totals are some 76 killed and 108 wounded which is extremely low for the extended period of the program. A preliminary analysis of alleged versus credible totals were provided in the JCS Resume of Air Strikes Programs Against the DRV, 4 November 1965.

2. Enclosure D updates the RT packages provided in the JCS Armed Reconnaissance Study Group Report, 1 December 1965.

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3. Restraints have prevented the US from successfully exploiting a predominate air superiority over the DRV. The enemy has been allowed to attack from sanctuaries employing limited equipment assets to a tactical advantage not commensurate with his capabilities and defenses. At the outset of the program, ROLLING THUNDER contained detailed and specific directives which severely limited the operational commander's actions. As the program progressed gradual modification of the restraints occurred and most of the more restrictive which governed the earlier armed reconnaissance and strike missions have been relaxed. The gradual ascending tempo of the program and the slow movement to the north afforded the DRV time in which to maximize his defensive forces. AAA has built up and SAMs have been deployed and used against our forces. The rules and requirements which governed early operations against the DRV significantly degraded US capabilities. This loss of tactical flexibility, increased likelihood of attrition, and decreased effectiveness against the enemy must be considered in analyzing the results and effects of the ROLLING THUNDER program to date.

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